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SUBJECT: MORE BANG FOR YOUR BUCK: SSH/DHRF SUCCESS

11. SUMMARY: The Ambassador's Special Self Help (SSH) and Democracy and Human Rights Funds (DHRF) provide direct, inexpensive, and meaningful assistance to projects throughout Madagascar and the Comoros. They generate tremendous positive publicity and good will for the United States. From women entrepreneurs, to farmers, to the handicapped, these funds accomplish Mission Strategic Objectives at the grassroots level. END SUMMARY.

12. The Department received USD 2.95 million in FY 2006 for the Ambassador's SSH Fund for use throughout Africa. Last year Post received USD 80,000 for Madagascar and USD 18,000 for Comoros in SSH Funds and USD 80,000 for Madagascar and USD 22,000 for the Comoros in DHRF. In comparison to other U.S. Government expenditures, these allocations may appear insignificant. However, the positive impact of these small projects in their local communities, as well as the goodwill generated toward the U.S., makes them disproportionately valuable to our Mission here in Madagascar and the Comoros. As a development tool, the impact of these funds is confined to a tiny locality, but in that location the project benefit is very concrete and tangible. As a public diplomacy tool it may be disproportionate, but a five thousand dollar pump can often generate as much positive publicity as a five million dollar technical assistance program.

13. In Madagascar, the SSH and DHRF programs have been running since the late 1960s and have established a nation-wide reputation. No longer is promotion of the SSH program necessary, as demand far outweighs supply. Indeed, Post requests allocation increases every year in the hopes of funding more of the worthwhile projects that current resource limits force us to turn down.

Success Story: Restaurant with Women's Group

14. Six women stopped a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) in their village. They wanted to open a small restaurant. There is no electricity in their village. There is no school past 6th grade. There are definitely no restaurants. It is a village of about 600 people that only in 2004 had two water pumps installed providing clean, clear water as opposed to the mud and dung-filled watering holes that they were used to. This village still suffers from a hunger season before the harvest.

15. This west coast village is located on the hot and dusty tourist route leading from Morondava past the Allee des Baobabs to the Tsingy National Park. These women see up to 15 tourists per day

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stopping in their village to buy traditional carvings made by a local association of carvers. Wouldn't this same group of people be

thirsty for a cold drink? Or even hungry for lunch or dinner? And what about the many researchers and NGO workers that spend time in the village with no place to eat?

¶16. These six women wanted solar panels and a small refrigerator. With the help of the PCV, they filled out the SSH proposal and submitted it to the U.S. Embassy. They did not need a computer. They did not need to access the internet. They did not need to travel to the capital. All they needed was a pen and the proposal form.

¶17. The inauguration of their restaurant - "Hotely Soafianatsy" - was held on June 16, 2007. The solar panels are up and running. The refrigerator is stocked with cold sodas. Coincidentally, six French adventure bicyclists passed by on the very same day. They were hot and tired and very hungry. They paid for 12 meals (two each) and more than flattered the women entrepreneurs with their appetite.

¶18. Last week a group of 16 American high school students paid to eat lunch there every day during their two week study tour of the region, not only benefiting the restaurant but also increasing their exchange with Malagasy culture. All of this for the project cost of USD 5,000. All of this for perhaps a little more than the cost of a roundtrip airplane ticket for one State Department official to travel to the U.S. from Post.

Success Story: Lentil Farmer

¶19. Mr. Henri Jean and his father have been farming lentils and rice on their land for the last 50 years. Their association of farmers is now the sole producer of lentils for the two largest grocery stores in Madagascar. Last year they submitted an SSH proposal to enable the farmers to utilize crop rotation methods on their property. Their land sits up high with plenty of water surrounding it but at a lower elevation than the farmland. The association was awarded USD 2,750 to purchase a water pump distributing low-lying water into the rice fields. In this way, the farmers can plant and harvest leguminous lentils in one season. And in the next season, they can benefit from the enriched soils to sow rice with enough water to reach harvest.

¶110. Henri Jean is now receiving inquiries from businessmen interested in exporting their lentils to Mauritius. With an insignificant sum of money, the U.S. Embassy was able to leverage one small farmers' association's enthusiasm and capabilities to encourage exactly the kind of economic development our Mission seeks for Madagascar.

Success Story: Rights of the Handicapped

¶11. A study by Handicap International in 2000 stated that only 10 percent of handicapped children in Madagascar are provided with an education. Over the past five years, the Ambassador's DHRF Program has supported the Centre Sembana Mijoro. The Centre provides scholarships and technical training to physically handicapped children and promotes implementation of Madagascar's Handicap Law. The Centre literally receives children, parents, and educators at their doorstep with questions such as this by a 13 year old cripple - "Is it true that a physically handicapped girl like me is unable to learn?" She had never attended school.

¶112. The Embassy has financed their production of a small educational brochure, a census of handicapped students in Antananarivo, reports to government and media on the state of the treatment of handicapped individuals, and seminars educating the audience about the Handicap Law and to explain the rights of handicapped individuals.

Success Story: Comoros

¶113. Two successful DHRF projects are addressing the needs of handicapped populations on all three islands of the Comoros. For the sum of USD 16,000, technicians have been provided with supplies and training in making leg braces, knee splints, and treatment of club feet. The second project with the minimal cost of USD 6,000 provides humanitarian gifts to children and handicapped individuals.

Over 11,000 boxes filled with toys, tooth brushes, pens, pencils, and school notebooks have been delivered. The potential impact of the SSH and DHRF programs in the Comoros has yet to be fully realized, but clearly has every bit the same potential for success as the long-established programs in Madagascar.

COMMENT: LOW COST, HIGH IMPACT

¶14. Because the amounts of funds involved are so small, it is easy to overlook these invaluable resources, or to let them fall under the budget cutter's knife. From our perspective, this would be a terrible mistake. Dollar-for-dollar there are few better uses of our development resources. END COMMENT.

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